

Creating School Environments Responsive to Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Families: Traditional and Systemic Approaches for Consultation

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The authors review research on (a) gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) families and the nature of discrimination against them; (b) school factors that hinder and facilitate equity for GLBT families; (c) instituting change through organizational consultation or large group-level strategies; and (d) instituting change through traditional consultation or small group and individual level strategies. Taking an ecological perspective, the school is viewed as a system trying to maintain the status quo in the face of increasing pressures to change. The need for systemic change when establishing antiharassment and GLBT-friendly environments in schools is highlighted. The consultant identifies the obstacles hindering change and empowers the system to reorganize itself and connect with resources that will help establish collaboration between straight and gay members of the school community. This role requires a unique combination of expertise in social processes, group dynamics, organizational change, and GLBT issues. Specific consultant strategies for small groups and individuals are identified. Resources for consultants and future research directions also are provided.

The once idealized “modern nuclear family” is no longer the norm in the United States (Johnson & O’Connor, 2002; Walsh, 2003). There is now acknowledgement that parents may be biological, adoptive, step, or foster, that they may be single or in a couple, and that they may be married, divorced, widowed, remarried, or in a partnership, gay, straight, or transgender. Yet, social institutions, including schools, are often steeped in the more traditional family model, and despite efforts to adapt to the needs of changing and diverse family structures, they often lag behind societal realities.

A well-established literature demonstrates that parent-school partnerships benefit all students (e.g., Esler, Godber, & Christenson, 2002), and school consultants have been called on to move schools forward in developing school environments that allow for the full participation of all parents as cocontributors to their children’s education. Over the last few decades, the changing family demographics have led to efforts to collaborate with families with diverse structures, including single-parent and stepfamilies (e.g., Bozett, 1987; Carlson, 1995; Schwartz, 1999).

In recent years, people who are gay have received increased attention in the media. Almost daily there is a newspaper or a TV program inviting examination of gay marriage, gay parenting, gays in the Army, schools for gay students, or gays in the entertainment industry. In addition, more sexual minority families are identifying themselves in the schools (Patterson, 2003; Ryan & Martin, 2000). This attention has resulted in increased visibility for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) families and necessitates reconsideration of their relationships with schools (Ryan & Martin, 2000).

The goal of this article is to discuss how school consultants can help create school environments that are responsive to GLBT families. It describes (a) GLBT families and the nature of discrimination against them, (b) school factors that hinder and facilitate equity for GLBT families, (c) instituting change through organizational consultation or large group level strategies, (d) instituting change through traditional consultation via small group and individual level strategies, (e) directions for future research, and (f) resources for consultants. This article distinguishes between traditional and systemic approaches for consultation in schools. Traditional consultation models are the most frequently used consultative models in schools (e.g., instructional, behavioral, and mental health). These models often assume that there is a single source for a problem (e.g., instructional, mental health) and rely on indirect delivery of small group and individual interventions. Systemic consultative methods are emerging as highly effective, assume that problems result from interactions of multiple sources,

and employ both small group-individual and large group-organizational interventions. Taking an ecological perspective, the consultant can focus on empowering all parties involved and establishing collaboration between straight and gay members of the school community.

GLBT FAMILIES: SEXUAL DIVERSITY IN PARENTING AND FAMILIES

Sexual orientation is defined by a person's emotional and physical attraction to other people (of their own sex, the opposite sex, or both sexes). Homosexuality refers to sexual orientation where an individual is attracted to individuals of the same sex. Gay is used to describe a man who is attracted to other men, and lesbian is used to describe a woman who is attracted to other women. Heterosexuality refers to sexual orientation where an individual is attracted to individuals of the other sex (these individuals are labeled as straight). Finally, individuals who are attracted to both sexes are described as bisexual. Although sexual orientation refers to one's behavior, sexual identity refers to one's internal definition and expression of one's sex, which may be different from one's physical sex. Transgender refers to someone whose sexual identity, including one's internal definition and expression of one's sex, may be different from his or her physical sex (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays [PFLAG], 2003; Ponton, 2003). Distinctions can be made between "closeted," "out," and "partially out" individuals. People who choose not to disclose their sexual orientation or identity are often referred to as "closeted." People who disclose their sexual orientation to a selected group of people (e.g., family, close circle of friends) but not others (e.g., coworkers) are said to be partially out of the closet or "partially out." Individuals who are open about their sexual orientation across all spheres of their lives are referred to as "out." Families of individuals who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender are often referred to as "gay families" and can also be described as "out," "closeted," or "partially out" (Lamme & Lamme, 2002).

It is estimated that there are as many as 5 million lesbian mothers and 3 million gay fathers in the United States (Patterson, 1992) with between 6 and 14 million children with GLBT parents (Ryan & Martin, 2000). The numbers are not precise, as many individuals do not disclose their way of life for fear of discrimination against them and their children. This fear is realistic and studies show that there is continuing discrimination against GLBT people in the United States (Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network [GLSEN], 2001; Laird, 1993). GLBT individuals face discrimina-

tion that is compounded by the fact that some are immigrants, minority, poor, and so forth. Discrimination can occur through active (e.g., verbal or physical assault) or passive (e.g., lack of discrimination laws) means, and at multiple levels (e.g., classroom rules, state policies).

The majority of empirical studies on GLBT issues in school communities concern themselves with the GLBT students and not with the GLBT parents. A review of multiple sources (e.g., books, Web sites) and informal interviews with gay and lesbian parents (e.g., informal interviews in person and online), as well as activists for GLBT rights in school, suggest that experiences of GLBT parents in school are often similar to that of GLBT students and are affected by the school environment, seen as gay hostile or gay friendly (e.g., Kozik-Rosabal, 2000; Lamme & Lamme, 2002; Woog, 1995).

There is evidence describing what makes GLBT student experiences in schools negative and what contributes to positive experiences. In 2001, the GLSEN conducted the National School Climate Survey involving 904 students from 48 different states and the District of Columbia. Results revealed that 83.2% of GLBT students experienced homophobic remarks from their peers, 65% reported being sexually harassed, 40% reported being harassed physically, and 21% reported physical assault. The lack of corrective action from the school staff was cited as a contributing factor to GLBT students' feeling unsafe in schools (GLSEN, 2001). The Hostile Hallways Survey found that schools often ignore the harassment that takes place in school buildings, whether it is bullying or sexual harassment (American Association of University Women Educational Foundation, 2001). In the case of homophobia, many schools fail to acknowledge the problem and consequently fail to have any supportive resources available for the students (GLSEN, 2001). The impact on GLBT students is traumatic; they feel unsafe and gradually come to disassociate from the school community and drop out of school (e.g., 30% of GLBT students had skipped classes because they felt unsafe in the classroom; GLSEN, 2001). The percentage of GLBT students who were more likely to feel safer and have a sense of belonging in the school community was 38.1% when the schools provided positive portrayals of gay people, 35.1% when the school had a staff member supportive of GLBT students, and 62.9 % when the school had gay-straight alliances or another type of club that addressed GLBT issues (GLSEN, 2001).

Although this research looks at GLBT students, it only suggests the problems that GLBT families face. Discrimination against children who have GLBT parents may take different forms, and the children's coping responses may be different as well. Research indicates that any kind of ha-

rassment and discrimination in the school community destabilizes the learning environment by engendering fear and causing division among members of the school community (Roberts & Coursol, 1996). The establishment of a safe atmosphere in schools requires a shift in collective thinking and involves systemic change.

SCHOOL FACTORS THAT HINDER AND FACILITATE EQUITY FOR GLBT FAMILIES

School systems have always reflected the larger society as they complied with and perpetuated ideological and political imperatives of the group in power (Perkinson, 1995). Systems strive to maintain the status quo. It is only in recent years that American schools have begun addressing the issues of diversity and multiculturalism, including sexual diversity. The school system's resistance to recognizing and accepting diversity is understandable as schools are facing an extremely complex task and need to be supported and empowered to overcome the pressures to maintain the status quo.

There are a number of long-standing barriers in serving GLBT families. Common obstacles originate on the societal level (global systemic obstacles) and then filter down to individual schools. Global societal obstacles include homophobia, prejudice, and societal taboos about discussing sexuality. These provide fertile ground for multiple obstacles in specific contexts of a given school system. Commonly encountered manifestations of homophobia, prejudice, and taboos on sexuality include stereotypical views of GLBT families, myths about GLBT individuals, poor communication between the schools and families on issues pertinent to the child, and avoidance or even prohibition of discussions of sexuality and diversity in sexual expression within and outside of curricula.

Often schools have had stereotypical views of GLBT families and their needs (Ryan & Martin, 2000). GLBT families are diverse, their needs are not limited to coping with discrimination related to sexual orientation, and they change as the children grow older. Families who adopt young children may be more concerned with addressing the issue of adoption with their children and providing them with a loving and supportive environment than with coming out to the children's school (James, 2002). Other important issues may be inadvertently ignored as the issues related to sexual orientation overwhelm school professionals.

Views of GLBT families are related to stereotypes about the GLBT community. Often people expect to be able to immediately recognize GLBT

parents because of mannerisms, attire, and so forth (Malone & Cleary, 2002). In part, these stereotypes are supported by the bias that homosexuality makes the person different from others in all respects and that this difference is obvious. On the other hand, many GLBT parents do not actively "come out" to their children's schools because they believe that their children will then be discriminated against (Lamme & Lamme, 2002). There are agencies that can provide help to GLBT parents with establishing communication with their schools (see *Resources for Consultants* at the end of this article).

Just as in the larger society, an abundance of myths and lack of information fuels homophobia in schools. Examples include the following: "Children brought up in gay or lesbian families become gay or lesbian because they do not have appropriate role models" or "Many gay men molest young boys." Contemporary research refutes these myths (e.g., Clarke, 2001; Patterson, 2003), yet the general public is not educated about these results.

Most curricula do not deal with diverse family structures. Although a major mission of schools is to educate and empower with knowledge by providing accurate information, heterosexual bias remains strong. Heterosexuality is viewed as a norm and is implied about every individual. Because it is so ingrained, the discussion of heterosexual relationships is not as strongly associated with divulging sexual information as it is in the case of homosexual or bisexual sexual orientation. On the other hand, in general, knowledge about human sexuality and gender development is lacking in the curriculum. Consequently, some schools do not want to include topics on alternative families in their curriculums. Perhaps this is because schools are unclear as to how to include it in the curriculum. In essence, the focus should be on discussing different types of family constellations rather than on sexual behaviors of family members (Clarke, 2001; Macgillivray, 2000; Ponton, 2003; Ryan & Martin, 2000).

Schools and families often fail to establish effective communication, and as a result, each side is driven by its preconceived notions and assumptions about each other (e.g., Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Davies, 1997; Gettinger & Guetschow, 1998). It is important that all the professionals involved in the child's school life have a meeting with the parents and develop a plan on how to deal with various questions other parents or children may have, how the parents want the staff to address them, and so forth. In one case, the school nurse called the child's home when the child had an upset stomach and refused to speak to the father. The father called the second father and the nurse said "I already spoke to Andy's dad. I need to speak to the mom. You know, moms know this stuff better. No offense.

Mr. X. is Andy's father ... And who are you to Andy?" (Informal interview on September 12, 2003, with a gay family).

The effort for changing the school climate needs to be initiated from both the school and the GLBT families. Although schools are reflecting beliefs and practices of a larger society, it does not mean that a given school cannot change its own beliefs and practices. On the contrary, schools have multiple strengths that make them perfect candidates for change. In particular, they work with young people who are still developing their attitudes and practices. Therefore, schools have potential for change as long as they empower the students and families.

Creating a microclimate within a given school that is different from the climate in an overall community requires systemic change. An individual or a team of individuals who will coordinate the efforts for establishing a new ecology in the school will have to perform multiple roles (e.g., educators, problem solvers). Consultants will need to work at the large group level (organizational, ecological level) and small group and individual level (psychological, behavioral level) and will utilize their expertise in social psychology, systems theory, organizational change, collaborative planning, problem solving, reframing, and habits reversal to encourage change (Curtis & Stollar, 2002).

INSTITUTING CHANGE THROUGH ORGANIZATIONAL CONSULTATION: LARGE GROUP STRATEGIES

Establishing equality for all families represents a serious challenge to the schools because it requires organizational change and strategic planning involving families, the community, and the schools. Schools rely on consultants' expertise in strategic planning, organizational change, and collaboration to facilitate changes within buildings and the community (Curtis & Stollar, 2002; Illback, Zins, & Maher, 1999; Knoff, 2002). Consultants' expertise and skills required for instituting organizational change for building equality for all families are no different from skills required for creating antibullying programs and establishing safe environments for all children.

Successful consultation will in part depend on the consultant's understanding of how the system operates. Schools are complex living organisms with established patterns of communication, problem solving, and power distribution. Also, it is staff members, families, as well as the communities, that make up the school systems. Accurate evaluations of social processes and group dynamics within each school are part of consultation

and have an impact on the consultant's effectiveness. Each building has formal and informal social structures that play various roles in the system. The role of a consultant is to utilize the existing structures to initiate change within the system and help the system self-sustain change. For example, it is up to the consultant to realize who is holding the power in a specific building, who makes the decisions, implements the decisions, and sabotages the good initiatives. Havelock and Zlototow (1995) presented a model for conducting systemic consultation where they described processes for consultants to follow.

The critical component of successful consultation will be involvement of all the parties, including those appearing to hold power within the system, who may or may not be the school administrators. In some cases, informal power holders are the most senior members of the staff or the most articulate and active parents. These individuals often hold the keys to the climate in the school building. Their leverage needs to be recruited by the consultant to establish group process that is change welcoming. It may be productive to prepare the ground for consultation by gathering the power holders and decision makers together and helping them to develop a vision of what their school will look like if it is to become more inclusive and welcoming of diverse students and their families. Framing the agenda for this meeting will depend on the specific characteristics of the school, but the ultimate goals of this meeting include the following: (a) establishing an executive subsystem within the school that holds true power and is capable of making decisions that get implemented, (b) communicating to the school community that the issue of discrimination against GLBT families is taken seriously and changes are needed, and (c) learning about forces that may facilitate or resist changes from happening by meeting these forces in person.

Resistance toward systemic changes is not an abstract force, but resides within people and is maintained by those in power. To overcome the resistance, the consultant needs to become very knowledgeable about its content and holders. Overcoming resistance does not mean opposing it. It means working with resistance through reframing and restructuring individuals' thoughts and beliefs. The refutation will include working through the misconceptions and misunderstandings about GLBT issues, dispelling the myths about GLBT individuals and their families, repairing communication between all the parties in this school's system, and providing the school community with resources for initiating and maintaining change (e.g., connect them with GLBT centers that conduct training, advocate for the families, etc.).

The meeting of the executive subsystem needs to be followed by a school-wide meeting where the agenda of creating a welcoming school en-

vironment for GLBT families is introduced and everyone is invited to provide input. It may be beneficial for the members of the executive subsystem to work with small groups within the school community on what needs to be done in their school, what can be done, how it will be evident, and who would like to do it. The consultant can assist by preparing information about negative consequences of harassment and positive consequences of having a gay-friendly environment. Role-play scenarios will provide school professionals with an outlet to vent their frustration and to practice formulating reactions to harassment. For example, individuals can role-play a social exchange between three young men. One man shares that he cries when he watches melodrama. Another man says the following: "Are you gay or something? This is so gay." The third man needs to say something to address the harassing nature of the remark (PFLAG, 2003).

The vital part of introducing change in how individuals think about and react to homosexuality is providing them with alternative beliefs and behaviors. The perpetrators, the victims, and the bystanders are the three major groups that are involved in discriminatory practices. Bullying and harassment tend to occur when it is possible to compensate for one's low confidence by belittling others. The low confidence in agents of harassment is facilitated by the low level of confidence in bystanders. The bystanders need to be trained to recognize, intervene, and prevent harassment. The perpetrators need to be trained to increase their competence via means other than harassment (e.g., Banyard, Plante, & Moynihan, 2004; Hazler, 1996; Levine, Cassidy, Brazier, & Reicher, 2002).

In cases such as antigay harassment prevention, it may not always be possible to quickly initiate a real change in a way certain individuals think about GLBT families, but it is certainly possible to initiate a change in how they act by instituting a different set of responses and consequences to their discriminatory actions. For example, the staff members who may not be very clear about what constitutes antigay harassment and who, therefore, may tolerate antigay behaviors in their students and colleagues will feel that they have a firm ground for objecting to these actions once they are educated and trained on how to respond to discriminatory behaviors. The major vehicle for empowering the school professionals, the parents, and the students is educating them on such issues as the following: (a) What does it mean to be gay? (b) How does one collaborate and communicate with diverse families, including GLBT families? (c) How does one address his or her discomfort, lack of competence, or lack of experience when working with a GLBT family? (d) How does one advocate for the families? (e) How does one react when he or she witnesses harassment? (f) How of-

ten does harassment happen? (g) What forms does harassment take? (h) How are people affected by harassment? (i) What are the educational, social, and psychological consequences of experiencing harassment? Consultants can initiate and then facilitate various task forces that will be designated to develop school policies on harassment, hate, and violence against any group at school (Tolerance.org, 2004).

It is also important to understand the patterns of communication and dissemination of information within the school building (Havelock & Zlotolow, 1995). Maladaptive communication patterns are often at the root of failed efforts to change. For example, parents are often informed about important changes that are about to take place in their child's school via letters sent home with children. This route of relating the information to the parents allows for (a) parents not getting the information because the child forgets about the letter or the parent ignores "another paper from school," or (b) misinterpretation of the planned changes as parents are excluded from the discussion of the change process; they are just being informed about it. To avoid these difficulties, the consultant needs to establish communication patterns so that the information is shared, trusted, and accepted by all members of the school community.

INSTITUTING CHANGE THROUGH TRADITIONAL CONSULTATION: SPECIFIC CONSULTANT INTERVENTIONS VIA THE SMALL GROUP AND INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

A framework is provided in this article to achieve systemic changes by using specific intervention strategies. These strategies have as their goal physical and psychological changes in the school. Specific strategies are grouped by the outcomes that GLBT parents are looking for in a school: (a) acknowledgement of GLBT community and welcoming atmosphere, (b) the school's proactive stance on the issue of discrimination against GLBT families, (c) open communication about GLBT issues, (d) straight-gay alliances within the school, and (e) the implementation of a *Safe Zone* program (GLSEN, 2001; T. Bogus, personal communication, September 15, 2003; informal interviews with GLBT parents).

Acknowledgement of GLBT Community and Welcoming Atmosphere

One of the most important strategies is arranging the physical environment in a way that signals that diversity is welcomed and promoted. To clearly

designate the school's stance toward sexual diversity, start with positive highlights such as books about, photographs of, and portraits of famous members of the GLBT community, rainbow flags, and continue with such preventive measures as posted school policy explicitly specifying gender harassment as an offense, and flyers with facts about discrimination and its consequences. These symbols will help to shape behavior in a positive way and communicate expectations regarding desired behavior in the school.

The School's Stance on Discrimination Against GLBT Families

A school that takes a proactive stance in preventing harassment and intervening when discrimination occurs is perceived as a welcoming and supportive environment for GLBT families. Schools may provide mandatory training for teachers, counselors, librarians, nurses, and Title IX coordinators about sexual orientation, gender identification, and anti-GLBT bullying interventions. On a more concrete level, parents want to be reassured by hearing examples of how incidents were handled. For example, one mother learned that her son was going to be sexually humiliated in a locker room. She went and spoke to the assistant principal and the teacher. The identified bullies were called in and asked to explain their intentions. The school's rules were explained to them and the consequences of their intent were clearly delineated (i.e., a police report would be filed). The parents of the identified bullies were informed of the incident and asked to come in to school and meet with the counselor and teacher (GLBT community members, personal communication, September 12, 2003; Kozik-Rosabal, 2000). This example illustrates the importance of explicitly stating and strongly enforcing zero tolerance antidiscriminatory policies (Kozik-Rosabal, 2000; informal interviews with GLBT community members, September 12, 2003).

Open Communication

Inclusive language, both verbal and printed, facilitates change in the school climate by providing individuals with accurate ways of articulating their thoughts, questions, and requests. For example, school registration forms need to allow for alternative family constellations. The letters that go out to families from schools should address *families* and children's *guardians*. These terms are far more inclusive than *parents* (e.g., Lamme & Lamme, 2002). When talking to students about families, do not limit families to heterosexual families.

A school that addresses and includes GLBT issues in both the extracurricular activities and in the curriculum in history, art history, or social sciences is a desirable environment for GLBT families (PFLAG, 2003). When covering biographies of famous writers, acknowledging the sexual orientation of Oscar Wilde and others may be one example at the high school level. Alternatively, when talking to elementary school children about their plans for the future, include books about gay and lesbian families. Parents want the schools to validate their children's reality that they are coming from loving families where parents want them to do well in class. When schools ignore or exclude GLBT issues from the curriculum, they often challenge a child's experience and prompt him or her to think that it is atypical, that it is not normal (Clarke, 2001; GLSEN, 2001; PFLAG, 2003).

Gay–Straight Alliances

Forming alliances between GLBT students and families and straight students and families has been shown to be successful in stopping and preventing harassment and in establishing a welcoming environment in the school (GLSEN, 2001; PFLAG, 2003). It is important that the school has alliances of straight and GLBT individuals because “coming out” of the closet is a two-way street. When parents see flyers and bulletin boards on gay–straight alliances they see that the school is trying to be aware, open, proactive, and supportive (T. Bogus¹, personal communication, September 15, 2003; PFLAG, 2003).

At the high school level, alliances are often run by the students with the supervision of a designated staff member trained in GLBT issues. The groups meet after classes in a space provided by the school. These meetings often provide opportunities for discussing sexual identity and gender issues with information provided to the students in an age-appropriate manner (e.g., how to talk to your parents, where to look for more support and guidance, etc.; PFLAG, 2003; T. Bogus, personal communication, September 15, 2003).

From Safe Person to Safe Zone to Safe School

Consultants can facilitate the implementation of a *Safe Person* or *Safe Zone* program (PFLAG, 2003). Under the *Safe Person* program, a designated safe person in the school system serves as a representative of the school to the

¹Terry Bogus is a Director of the Gay Center in Greenwich Village, New York.

GLBT community. This person serves as a mediator who can coordinate and problem solve effectively to maintain open communication between different groups within the school. The *Safe Zone* gets established by the teacher, counselor, nurse, or any school professional joining the gay-straight alliance in the school and making his or her room or office inclusive and welcoming to GLBT individuals. The school representatives may use a separate space in their rooms where they display materials on diversity, antiharassment policies, GLBT resources, GLBT-inclusive books and videos, and health and referral information (PFLAG, 2003). Practice suggests that once several persons participate in the *Safe Zone* program, others will follow given the positive consequences of the program. GLSEN reports that positive changes occur within the first few weeks and then spread throughout the schools within a few months so that the *Safe Zone* may set off a self-perpetuating change in the school system (PFLAG, 2003; Guthrie, 1996).

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The success of school-wide reforms aimed at creating GLBT family-friendly environments is not well documented. Research is needed that will provide a record of variables associated with stories of success and failures of such reforms in consultative interventions. Critical in such research is its longitudinal course and the use of statistical methods appropriate for an ecological approach to research rather than traditional linear cause-and-effect paradigms. System-wide school climate measures and classroom climate scales (e.g., Classroom Systems Observation Scale; Fish & Dane, 2000) may help to assess systemic change.

Another important line of research in consultation is investigating training models that produce the most skillful systemic consultants. The informal interviews of the GLBT parents suggest that they usually either initiated the programmatic changes themselves or brought in an external consultant. This is because school professionals often lacked expertise in GLBT issues, group dynamics, and systemic interventions, which prevented them from being more proactive in their settings. It is important to question whether providing school professionals (e.g., school psychologists, counselors) with more training and practice in group dynamics and organizational change will be associated with more preventive measures.

Also, research on pathways of social and emotional development of biological versus adopted children from GLBT families will benefit the field of consultation in terms of fine-tuning the services offered by the schools and community centers. Such research helps to answer questions many school

social workers, psychologists, and counselors may confront: What constitutes parent training for GLBT families with adopted children? What are the developmental issues that these children face as they grow up? How should school-based programs for children coming from GLBT families differ across elementary, middle, and high school?

Another line of future research is investigation of rural versus suburban versus urban GLBT families and their participation in schools. With the growing use of the Internet, gay rights and gay pride organizations are able to offer informational and psychological support to many, no matter how remote their locale. Besides this virtual support, what can schools do for families that do not live in areas rich with resources for the gay community? Overall, more research is needed on experiences that GLBT families have in schools.

CONCLUSION

This article presented an overview of current knowledge in GLBT research and practice in relation to school children and their families as well as recommendations on how to conduct systemic consultation to promote GLBT-friendly environments in schools. Further research is needed to empirically validate strategies described in this article. Throughout the discussion, the need for systemic change when establishing antiharassment and GLBT-friendly environments in schools was highlighted. It is clear that the contemporary public school system is under considerable stress, and if it is stagnated, it is because the system is trying to maintain the status quo when its responsibilities are being extended and its resources are decreasing. In many cases, the consultants will walk into the situations where the "bottom" level of the system (e.g., students, parents, teachers) wants change whereas the "top" level of the system (e.g., administration at all levels) can no longer regulate the system relying on old means. The consultant's role is then to establish communication between the "top" and the "bottom" levels as to empower the system to reorganize itself and to connect it with resources that will help the change to survive. This role will require a unique combination of expertise in social processes, group dynamics, organizational change, and GLBT issues.

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RESOURCES FOR CONSULTANTS

Books

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- Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. (2003). *From our house to the schoolhouse. Families and educators partnering for safe schools*. Washington, DC: Author.
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Audio and Video Resources

It's Elementary: Talking About Gay Issues in Schools By Women's Educational Forum:
<http://www.youth.org/loco/PERSONProject/Resources/Videos/elementary3.html>
 Our House: A Very Real Documentary About Kids of Gay and Lesbian Parents by Mima
 Padola. Sugar Pictures: <http://www.itvs.org/ourhouse>

Web Sites

APA Resolution on Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Issues: <http://www.apa.org/pi/reslgb.html>
 NASP Position Statement on Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Youth: <http://www.nasponline.org/advocacy/glb.html>
 National Institute of Mental Health: <http://www.nmha.org/whatdoesgaymean.com>
 School Counselor Association. Just the Facts About Sexual Orientation: A Primer for Principals, Educators, and School Personnel:

Organizations

Children of Lesbians and Gay Everywhere (COLAGE): <http://www.colage.org>
 Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN): <http://www.glsen.org>
 Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG): <http://www.pflag.org>
 Students and Gay-Straight Alliances: <http://www.glsen.org/templates/student>

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